

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY MANAMA BAHRAIN

TO SECSTATE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY 2204

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI UAE

AMEMBASSY AMMAN JORDAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT LE

AMEMBASSY DOHA QATAR

AMEMBASSY JIDDA SAUDI ARABIA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON UK

AMEMBASSY MUSCAT OMAN

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN IRAN

COMIDEASTFOR

CNO WASHINGTON DC

SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON UK

S E C R E T MANAMA 0699 SECTION 02 OF 02

GOVERNMENT IS NOW (AND BELATEDLY) WILLING TO WORD IT RIGHT SO LONG AS IT GETS THE LAW. TACTICALLY, HOWEVER, THE GOVERNMENT SEEMS TO HAVE LET THE LEFTISTS MANEUVER THIS ISSUE OVER MANY MONTHS INTO A "CONSTITUTIONAL CONFRONTATION" BETWEEN THE "REGIME" (CABINET) AND THE "PEOPLE" (NATIONAL ASSEMBLY). NOW THE GOVERNMENT, WHICH HAS NOT YET LOST A VOTE IN THE ASSEMBLY, SEEMS TRAPPED INTO A SHOWDOWN WITH THE LEFTISTS ON THE LEAST FAVORABLE BUT MOST CRUCIAL OF BATTLE FIELDS -- RATIFICATION OF ITS AUTHORITY TO LOCK PEOPLE UP ON ESSENTIALLY POLITICAL GROUNDS. NOW GOVERNMENT HAS NO CHOICE BUT TO MEET THE LEFTISTS HEAD ON, BY SEEKING TO PERSUADE MODERATE/ CONSERVATIVE DEPUTIES THAT THEY HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO SUPPORT "GOD, THE PEOPLE, AND THE AMIR" (AND THE SECURITY

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DECREE) ON THE ONE HAND OR THE "COMMUNISTS" ON THE OTHER.

5. IN RETROSPECT IT APPEARS THAT GOVERNMENT'S SENSE OF TIMING WAS WAY OFF. IT HAD AT LEAST AS MUCH BASIC PARLIAMENT SUPPORT ON THIS ISSUE IN OCTOBER AS IT DOES NOW. A SHOWDOWN THEN WOULD HAVE PERMITTED A WHOLE PARLIAMENTARY SESSION OF CONSENSUS BUILDING ON "BREAD AND BUTTER" ISSUES. NOW IT FACES THE SHOWDOWN AT THE END OF THE PARLIAMENTARY SEASON, WITH MONTHS OF CAREFULLY CULTIVATED PARLIAMENTARY GOODWILL FRITTERING AWAY. NEVERTHELESS, GOVERNMENT STILL HAS SUBSTANTIAL ADVANTAGES AT ITS DISPOSAL: THERE IS NO EVIDENCE ASSEMBLY IS ANY MORE POPULAR THAN IS THE GOVERNMENT; GOVERNMENT HAS SUBSTANTIAL PATRONAGE PRESSURE TO BRING TO BEAR ON INDIVIDUAL DEPUTIES; THERE IS EVIDENCE LOCAL EDITORS ARE BEING BROUGHT AROUND TO TOE GOVERNMENT LINE; AND, ABOVE ALL, THE DEPUTIES ARE NO DIFFERENT FROM ANYONE ELSE IN BAHRAIN -- THEY ARE EAGER TO GET OUT OF TOWN FOR THE SUMMER.

6. AT THIS STAGE, ONE MIGHT STILL DISMISS BAHRAIN'S CURRENT "CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS" AS MELODRAMA BUT IF THE PRESENT STALEMATE FESTERS, THE SITUATION COULD BECOME MORE WORRYING. ALREADY GOB'S PREOCCUPATION WITH THIS ISSUE HAS ADVERSELY AFFECTED ITS ABILITY TO FOCUS ON OTHER PRESSING BUSINESS, INCLUDING THE NEGOTIATIONS ON U.S. NAVY PRESNECE. CERTAINLY PROLONGED STALEMATE WILL SOUR THE ATMOSPHERE OF THE DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENT IN BAHRAIN AND RAISE NEW QUESTIONS ABOUT BAHRAIN'S POLITICAL STABILITY. THIS IN TURN WILL GIVE BAHRAIN'S MORE CONSERVATIVE NEIGHBORS ADDITIONAL JUSTIFICATION FOR DALLYING ON THEIR WAY TO THE POLITICAL/SOCIAL 20TH CENTURY. IN THE LONG TERM, THIS FACTOR IS PERHAPS THE ONE THAT SHOULD CONCERN USG MOST.

7. IN THE MEANTIME, THERE IS REASON TO HOPE THE STREETS OF BAHRAIN WILL REMAIN QUIET SINCE IRONICALLY SO LONG AS THE STALEMATE OVER THE SECURITY DECREE CONTINUES THE GOVERNMENT HAS A DECREE IN HAND SHOULD IT NEED TO LOCK ANYONE UP.
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